

MEMORANDUM

Circular Letter: 02-08-428

TO: Hospital Administrators and Risk Managers
Ambulatory Surgical Center Administrators

FROM: Paul I. Dreyer, Ph. D., Director
Division of Health Care Quality

DATE: August 19, 2002

RE: Health Care Quality Safety Alert:
Preventing Operating Room Fires During Surgery

The Department of Public Health (the Department) is sending this alert to disseminate best practice recommendations that can assist hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers in the prevention of operating room fires during surgery. Over the past few years, the Division of Health Care Quality has received incident reports involving fires that occurred in operating rooms during surgery. Our review of those incidents and the medical literature published by ECRI¹ and others reveals that the three elements necessary for combustion (an oxidizer, a combustible substance and source of ignition) are often present during any surgical procedure and that management of these three elements can prevent fires. The Department urges hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers to evaluate the information provided in the attached safety alert and to use it in the development and implementation of policies and procedures to minimize the opportunities for fire to occur in the operating room during surgery.

The safety alert is also available on the Department's web page at www.state.ma.us/dph/dhcq/pdfs/orfires.pdf

If you have any questions, please contact the Department at 617-753-8000.

¹ ECRI is an independent nonprofit health services research agency that focuses on healthcare technology, healthcare risk and quality management, and health care environmental management. ECRI's Medical Device Safety Reports are posted at its free clinical web-site at www.mdsr.ecri.org/